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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000215

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT CHEN REPEATS FAMILIAR POSITIONS ON  
TAIWAN STATUS IN CNN INTERVIEW

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director Robert S. Wang,  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

11. (SBU) Summary: In an interview with CNN broadcast on January 27, President Chen Shui-bian reiterated familiar positions about Taiwan being "an independent, sovereign country" as well as his commitment to defend "the peaceful status quo" across the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan's territory and sovereignty extend only to Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu, Chen asserted, adding that this is a fact and "there is no need to redefine it." Chen maintained his innocence against corruption allegations and also emphasized the importance of close U.S.-Taiwan relations. In the CNN interview and at greater length in remarks to the Global Forum on New Democracies on January 26, Chen discussed his hope to apply to join the UN under the name "Taiwan" rather than ROC. Chen maintained that this would not violate his "four no's" commitment to the U.S. because there would not be a change in Taiwan's formal name as the ROC. End Summary.

12. (SBU) CNN broadcast its "Talk Asia" interview with President Chen Shui-bian on Saturday, January 27. Chen responded to the CNN questions in a measured tone, making familiar points about Taiwan's status as "an independent, sovereign country" as well as his duty to defend "the peaceful status quo" in the Taiwan Strait. Chen highlighted the dramatic missile build-up across the Strait and spoke of the close U.S.-Taiwan relationship, based on shared democratic values, and having substantial economic and security components. Also, Chen noted his hope to bring civilian leadership to the military, referring to plans to appoint a civilian defense minister. Asked about corruption charges, Chen maintained his innocence and that of this family members, and predicted they would all be vindicated in the end. Chen also stressed his respect for the judicial process and rule of law. (Note: The Taiwan Presidential Office website subsequently posted a fuller version of the original interview, which took place on Tuesday, January 23. End Note.)

13. (SBU) After leaving office in 2008, Chen indicated he planned to remain active in politics, continuing to promote Taiwan democracy, including "Taiwan-centric consciousness" and social equity and justice. Asked about his legacy, Chen said he wanted to be remembered for his role in the first democratic transfer of political power in Taiwan. He said he

also wanted to be remembered as the president during whose term the people gained the right of referendum and the National Unification Council and Guidelines ceased to function and apply, "thereby returning the right of freely choosing their future to the people of Taiwan." Chen also wanted to be remembered as persevering in the fight against Beijing's "so-called one-China principle," as refusing to accept the "so-called 1992 consensus" (on one China), and as insisting that Taiwan is an independent, sovereign country not under the jurisdiction of the PRC. "The two sides of the Strait are different countries," Chen asserted.

#### No Need to Redefine Territory

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14. (SBU) According to Chen, Taiwan is an independent, sovereign country, whose territory and sovereignty only extends to Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu and has a population of 23 million. "This is a fact and there is no need to redefine it." "We cannot possibly fantasize that our territory extends to mainland China as well as Outer Mongolia, and that our population is 1.3 billion." Although independent and sovereign, Taiwan is not yet "a normal and complete country," Chen maintained. It is not normal because it is not a member of the UN family or the WHO, while it is not complete "because our current constitution has never been approved by our people. The 23 million people of Taiwan really need a new Taiwan constitution that is timely, relevant, and viable," Chen argued.

#### Applying to Join the UN as Taiwan Rather than ROC

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15. (SBU) On seeking UN membership, Chen referred to a poll

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showing that "almost 80 percent of Taiwan's people are in support of Taiwan joining the UN under the name 'Taiwan.'" Also referring to polling figures, Chen discussed his wish that "Taiwan-centric consciousness," i.e., self-identification as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, will continue to increase among the public and he predicted that the winner of the 2008 presidential election will be the candidate who insists on Taiwan-centric consciousness.

16. (SBU) Following the recording of the CNN interview, Chen spoke to a group of former presidents of several countries at the Global Forum on New Democracies on January 26, expanding on several of his ideas. Chen stressed his hope to apply to join the UN under the name Taiwan, a goal he said was supported by 70-80 percent of the Taiwan people. Chen asserted that this would not violate his "four no's" commitment nor involve a change in the national title, since, he said, 74 of 192 UN members had joined the organization under a name other than their full, formal title. "Therefore, using the name Taiwan to apply to join the UN absolutely is a major direction we can work toward." On the constitutional issue, Chen observed that all of the new democracies represented at the forum, except for Taiwan, had established new or revised constitutions during their transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Chen "deeply believed" that the time and conditions were now mature for Taiwan to give birth to a timely, relevant, and viable new constitution. Without a new Taiwan constitution, Chen argued, "Taiwan absolutely cannot be called a normal, complete and progressive new democracy."

#### Comment

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17. (C) Despite some rhetorical flourishes, Chen essentially repeated familiar positions rather than striking out in surprising new directions. Chen did indicate that he hopes this year to apply to join the UN under the name Taiwan rather than the Republic of China, without changing Taiwan's formal name (ROC). By laying out his plan at an early stage,

Chen may be testing the waters, seeking to gauge U.S. and other reactions before deciding whether to continue down this route. Beyond this, however, Chen proposed no new specific prescriptive measures and expressed his commitment to a "peaceful status quo" in the Taiwan Strait. That Chen's latest statements are essentially more of the same rather than anything dramatically different is reflected in the limited media interest. His CNN interview was covered only on the inside pages of the major Chinese language newspapers here, which focused largely on his claims of innocence in connection with recent scandals.

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